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ABSTRACT

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation surveyed 1,500 teachers regarding workload issues and stress. This report examines teachers' use of time during summer. Teachers described how many of the 9 summer vacation weeks they spent taking holidays, teaching summer school, working in employment other than teaching summer school, taking educational courses, volunteering, preparing for the upcoming school year, and engaging in other activities. Few teachers used all 9 weeks as traditional holidays. About one-quarter took 2 weeks of holiday or less in the summer, more than one-third took 3 weeks or less, and most used 58 percent of the summer vacation as holidays. Younger teachers took less vacation time than older teachers. Newer teachers were the most likely to take the shortest holidays. Low salaries and the high cost of living in British Columbia drove many teachers into summer work. One teacher in six spent part of the summer in the classroom, and one in eight spent some time volunteering. Nearly three-quarters spent at least 1 summer week preparing for the upcoming school year. The study showed a relationship between not taking adequate time off in the summer and certain negative health effects (e.g., fatigue, isolation, and health problems.) (SM)

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BCTF Research Report

Part of the BCTF Information Handbook

Section III
2001-WLC-04

ED 464 031

"How I spent my summer vacation":

Time-use data from the Spring 2001 BCTF Worklife of Teachers Workload issues and stress survey

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by Anne C. (Anny) Schaefer
December 2001

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Executive Summary

In the spring of 2001, BCTF Research surveyed 1,500 randomly selected members on workload issues and stress. This is one of a series of reports on that research. Here we focus on teachers' use of time during summer 2000. Our conclusions dispute the view that teachers have nine weeks of free time during the summer holidays.

We asked teachers to report how many of the approximately nine weeks of summer vacation 2000 they spent in each of the following activities: Taking holidays, teaching summer school, working in employment other than teaching summer school, taking educational courses, volunteering, preparing for the upcoming school year, or engaging in other activities.

Many teachers in B.C. are actually suffering from **"phantom summer vacation"**. While teachers ostensibly have two months off during the summer, it is rare for teachers to use all of this time as traditional holidays.

- One-quarter of B.C. teachers take two weeks of holidays or less in the summer.
- More than one-third of teachers take three weeks of holidays or less.
- The average teacher uses about 58% of her or his summer vacation as holidays.

Younger teachers take less time off in the summer than do older teachers.

Teachers with **less than 10 years of teaching experience** are the most likely to take the shortest holidays.

Low salaries relative to other professionals and the high cost of living in British Columbia drive many teachers to **work** during the summer.

- About 7% of teachers spend part of the summer teaching summer school.
- One in every 6 teachers (16.5%) works at a job other than teaching during the summer.
- More than 1 in 5 teachers (22%) teach or do other paid work during at least part of the summer.
- About 2% of teachers hold another job and teach summer school.

Many teachers – 1 in 6 (16.3%) – spend part of the summer in the classroom – **learning** new pedagogy and content to apply during the school year.

At least 1 in 8 teachers (12.6%) spends some time **volunteering** during the summer months.

Nearly three-quarters of teachers spend at least one week of summer vacation **preparing for the upcoming school year**. The proportion is 80% among full-time teachers.

- Preparing for the upcoming school year takes up a large chunk of teachers' summer time.
- This hidden **subsidy of the school system** indicates that preparation time during the school year is inadequate.
- **New teachers** are more than twice as likely as those with 20 to 24 years of experience to spend 3 to 4 weeks of their summer holidays preparing for the upcoming school year.

Other summer activities cited by teachers include handling family responsibilities, maintaining wellness/recovering from stress and illness, and looking after one's home.

Although causality cannot be demonstrated, our study does show a relationship between not taking adequate time off in the summer and certain negative health effects.

Fatigue:

- More than 85% of all teachers reported that their work resulted in fatigue.
- Of those who took no summer holidays, almost 95% reported feeling fatigued.
- Of those who took the full 9 weeks of summer vacation, 77% reported feelings of fatigue during the school year.

Less time with family or friends (isolation):

- 83% of those who took no holidays reported their worklife results in less time with family or friends, compared to 49% of those who took 9 weeks.

Less time for personal interests:

- 78% of those who took no summer holidays report that work pressures result in less time for their own personal interests or hobbies compared to 50% of those who took 9 weeks.

Health problems:

- 37% of teachers report some health problems related to their work life.
- Teachers who took only minimal holidays (0 to 3 weeks) were half again as likely as those who took 7 to 9 weeks to report health problems resulting from work (45% vs. 31%).
- Our results can be interpreted in light of mounting evidence that **prolonged stress—especially that caused by isolation and a sense of lack of control—can result in wear and tear on the body, with potential consequences that include heart disease, a weakened immune system, insulin resistance (potential for diabetes), and possibly cancer**.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Teachers who are physically and emotionally healthy are more likely to remain in the teaching profession, thus enhancing teacher retention in a time of potential teacher shortages. **It is in the best interest of teachers, students, and the education system for teachers to have a sustained period of rest and recuperation during the summer break**, given current working and learning conditions.
- While our survey provides evidence that B.C. teachers are a highly professional group of people who invest their own time to serve their students, improve their own qualifications, complete projects, and prepare educational programs, it also demonstrates that stress and health problems commonly result from teachers' attempts to **subsidize an under-resourced system** with their own time. Adequate **funding for learning resources**, adequate **preparation** and year-end **clean-up time**, and competitive professional **salaries** would make for healthier schools and teachers.
- Possible future research directions are suggested, including studies of **teachers who become ill or disabled** as well as **teachers who remain well**, perhaps examining what coping strategies work to maintain teachers' health. Further exploration of **gender-age-health interactions**, including such factors as the relationship of vacation time taken and patterns of illness and disability among teachers is also suggested. The existence and effect of **family-friendly policies** could be explored. A pilot project on **stress prevention** could be implemented and serve as a focus of research.
- A sea change in understanding of the nature of teachers' work needs to occur in the media and public policy so that teachers—and their students—are not bombarded with negative images of teaching and education.
- Replacing teacher-bashing and negative comments about public schools by the media, public and government with a supportive, respectful milieu in which true education can occur would go a long way to improving the work life of teachers and, consequently, the schools in which our children learn.

Section III
2001-WLC-04

"How I spent my summer vacation":

Time-use data from the Spring 2001 BCTF Worklife of Teachers Workload issues and stress survey

www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2001wlc04

by Anne C. (Anny) Schaefer
December 2001

Acknowledgments

BCTF Research wishes to thank all those teachers who added to their workload by responding to this and other BCTF surveys during the Spring of 2001. The range and depth of their responses have provided the data on which to base this report, which will be used to lobby government and school boards to develop a healthier school system by reducing teachers' workload and stress.

BCTF Research staff Larry Kuehn, Charlie Naylor and Anny Schaefer designed the survey instrument in consultation with BCTF staff and the bargaining team. BCTF Research Assistant Anne Field formatted the survey for TeleForm data entry, processed the surveys, and prepared the data for quantitative and qualitative analysis. Information Services Co-ordinator Diana Broome and Jean Rands of the Bargaining Division provided additional research.

2001 Worklife of Teachers survey series

In Spring 2001, BCTF Research staff prepared and administered three mail-out surveys focusing on teacher workload and stress. The first survey examined the workload of secondary teachers of English ("English Teaching Workload Survey Questionnaire," March 2001). The second considered workload and stress issues as perceived by both elementary and secondary teachers ("Workload Issues and Stress," April 2001), and the third addressed teacher perspectives on issues in Special Education ("Special Education," June 2001).

For further information and other worklife reports, visit the **Worklife of British Columbia teachers** home page at *www.bctf.ca/education/worklife* and Information Services' **Teacher workload** home page at *www.bctf.ca/info/research/TeacherWorkload/* . To be alerted when new reports are published, sign up for the BCTF Research Department's mailing list, *bctf-research*, by visiting *www.bctf.ca/research/list/* .

The **Workload Issues and Stress** questionnaire was mailed to 1,500 teachers selected randomly from the BCTF membership database (approximately 45,000 active teachers) with measures taken to ensure that all districts were represented; 644 elementary and secondary teachers from districts across the province returned surveys, for a return rate of 43%.

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Putting it in perspective

What people who don't know any better say…

B.C. teachers…enjoy holidays and other benefits most B.C. workers can only dream about.
– The Province, *editorial, September 10, 2001*

Summers off. Christmas season off. Spring break off. Professional development days. This comes close to three months holidays during the course of a year, not including weekends.
– *Dean Bassett,* The Daily Townsman *(Cranbrook), October 11, 2001*

(N)o matter how you cut it, a full year's pay for nine months work is a sweet deal.
– *Shelley Fralic,* The Vancouver Sun, *November 19, 2001*

What teachers say…

Since I started teaching, I've worked construction every summer but the one we spent moving to B.C., just to try to pay the mortgage.
– Martin Sunderland, *Surrey tech ed teacher, BCTF News Conference, November 29, 2001*

I took a $4,000 pay cut when I moved here from Ontario to be close to my daughter and grandchild; at the same time, my cost of living shot up ….
Now I'm considering working in the summer for the first time ever."
– Beth Lopez, *French immersion teacher, BCTF News Conference, November 29, 2001*

I am a single mom who does not go on holidays (since I have) no money during summer months.
– Comment from survey respondent

We … need more positive recognition and support from the public in general. Many perceive teaching to be easy (i.e., summers off) and don't understand the full extent of what we do.
They seem to forget that we are responsible for educating (their) children.
– Comment from survey respondent

The public does not respect teachers anymore. Whenever the public thinks of teachers they think of three months off during the year.
– Comment from survey respondent

Introduction

Some people say that teaching is a cushy job because teachers get two months' paid vacation during the summer, when school is typically out of session. Setting aside for the moment the issues of teachers' years of professional preparation and experience[1], their long workweek[2], unpaid overtime[3], and heavy workload during the 10-month school year[4], how do teachers spend their much-vaunted "nine weeks off"? **This report looks at teachers' activities during the summer of 2000**—the vacation period before the 2000/2001 school year when our surveys were conducted. We asked teachers to report how many of the approximately nine weeks of summer vacation 2000 they spent in each of the following activities: Taking holidays, teaching summer school, working in employment other than teaching summer school, taking educational courses, volunteering, preparing for the upcoming school year, or engaging in other activities.

Peter Owens photo

Martin Sunderland, Surrey tech ed teacher, works construction every summer.

Summer paycheques unusual

Knowing that my salary will not cover all the expenses and having to think how to pay for the summer (is a major source of stress).
–Comment from survey respondent

One thing is clear—few teachers spend their summer months being paid by a school district. Most teachers are on a 10-month earning schedule, with no paycheques issued during the summer months. Local collective agreements, since rolled over into the Provincial Collective Agreement, may have provisions for teachers to be paid on a 12-month rather than a 10-month basis. About 20 of these local agreements, covering 20% of the BCTF's approximately 45,000 members, provide this option. It is possible that other districts have local policies allowing teachers to spread out their pay, but 80% of teachers are not guaranteed this right in a collective agreement.

Source: BCTF Bargaining Division and Member Records.

[1] Most new teachers have completed five years of university and teacher education (Teacher Qualification Service Category 5), foregoing earnings, paying tuition and often accruing debt. See *www.tqs.bc.ca/*.

[2] A recent BCTF Research survey estimated that secondary English teachers in B.C. put in an average of 53.1 hours per week—"the equivalent of 54.9 weeks at 37.5 hours, almost three weeks more than there are in a full calendar year." (*"I love teaching English, but ...": A study of the workload of English teachers in B.C. secondary grades*, by Charlie Naylor and John Malcolmson, BCTF Research, September, 2001.) Another recent study found: "Overall, the average teacher is now spending around 58 hours a week in paid and unpaid teaching work (over 47 hours) and directly related learning activities (over 11 hours)." (New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL).)

[3] "Of all occupations examined, teaching was the most likely to entail extra hours (over 28% of teachers worked overtime between January and September 1997); furthermore, these hours were rarely paid for (95% of teachers were not paid for any overtime)." Doreen Duchesne, "Working overtime in today's labour market," *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, Statistics Canada Catalogue 75-001-XPE, Winter 1997, Vol. 9, No. 4.

[4] The questions of teacher workload and teacher stress during the regular school year are examined elsewhere in our Worklife 2001 series of reports. See *www.bctf.ca/education/worklife*.

Few teachers take two months of holidays

Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation, for when you come back to your work your judgment will be surer. Go some distance away because then the work appears smaller and more of it can be taken in at a glance and a lack of harmony and proportion is more readily seen.
–Leonardo da Vinci

hol•i•day *Often,* ***holidays****,* **pl.** *vacation; period of rest or recreation:* **the summer holidays.**
–Gage Canadian Dictionary, *1998*

Although they are **technically entitled to approximately nine weeks of holidays during the summer**, most teachers do not take this much time off. As shown in *Table 1*, **one quarter of B.C. teachers take two or fewer weeks of holidays in the summer, while more than one-third of teachers take three weeks or less**. The average teacher takes 5.2 weeks of time off as holidays during the summer, equivalent to about 58% of her or his entitlement.[5]

Table 1: Number of weeks of summer holidays taken, 2000

	FEMALE		MALE		TOTAL	
Weeks	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
0	13	3.5%	5	3.0%	18	3.4%
1	39	10.5%	6	3.6%	45	8.4%
2	54	14.5%	18	10.9%	72	13.4%
3	36	9.7%	12	7.3%	48	8.9%
4	27	7.3%	15	9.1%	42	7.8%
5	24	6.5%	5	3.0%	29	5.4%
6	27	7.3%	17	10.3%	44	8.2%
7	48	12.9%	28	17.0%	76	14.2%
8	66	17.7%	28	17.0%	94	17.5%
9	38	10.2%	31	18.8%	69	12.8%
TOTAL	372	100.0%	165	100.0%	537	100.0%

[5] This is a crude average, i.e., not adjusted for contract type, FTE status, gender or age.

Gender factors

Caution should be used in interpreting the gender differences apparent in *Figure 1*, since the relatively small number of male respondents (n=165) points to more variability in their responses.[6] It does appear, however, that **women are more likely than men to take fewer weeks of holidays**: 38% of women compared to 25% of men take zero to three weeks, while 19% of men and only 10% of women report taking all nine weeks off. On average, women take 5 weeks of summer holidays while men take 5.8 weeks.[7]

The age differences between male and female teachers may contribute to this disparity as male teachers are, on average, older than female teachers: 60% of male teachers are at least 45 compared to 48% of female teachers, while 25% of female teachers are under 35, compared to 16% of male teachers. The next section of this report provides data on summer holidays taken by age group *(Figure 2)*.

[6] This is a reflection of the growing proportion of teachers who are female: 70% of our respondents were female, compared to 68.3% of teachers. Ministry of Education Standard Report 2063, *Average Gross Salary of Educators by Gender and Position Within School District*, September 2000.

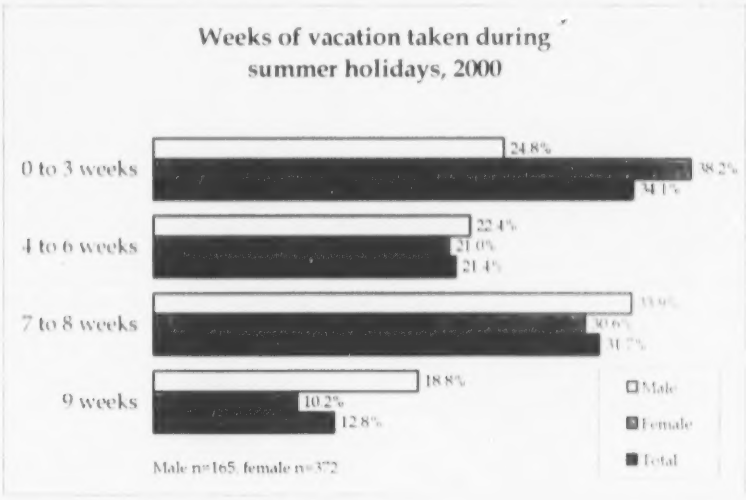
[7] This is a crude average, i.e., not adjusted for contract type, FTE status, or age.

Another factor is women's generally greater responsibilities on the home front. Women continue to do more unpaid work than men in all age and role groups and have correspondingly less leisure time.[8] Childcare and elder care are among the unpaid activities for which women assume a disproportionate responsibility.

Nonetheless, **given the stressful nature of teaching and the potential effects of stress on health and well-being, and given the evidence elicited by our survey on the effects of taking minimal time off during the summer, teachers may be well advised to make taking time out a higher priority, if at all possible.** Further research could be done in this area.

[8] For more on this topic, see the section entitled "Paid work, unpaid work and leisure" in *G.I. Joe meets Barbie, software engineer meets caregiver: Males and females in B.C.'s public schools and beyond*, www.bctf.ca/ResearchReports/2000sd03/

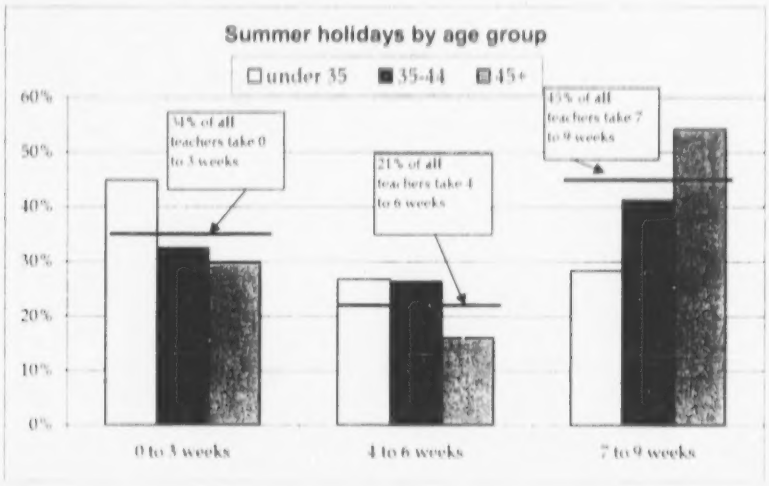
Figure 1



Age and teaching experience

Younger teachers take less time off in the summer than do older teachers *(Figure 2)*. Of those under 35, 45% take only zero to three weeks of holidays, compared to 30% of those 45

Figure 2

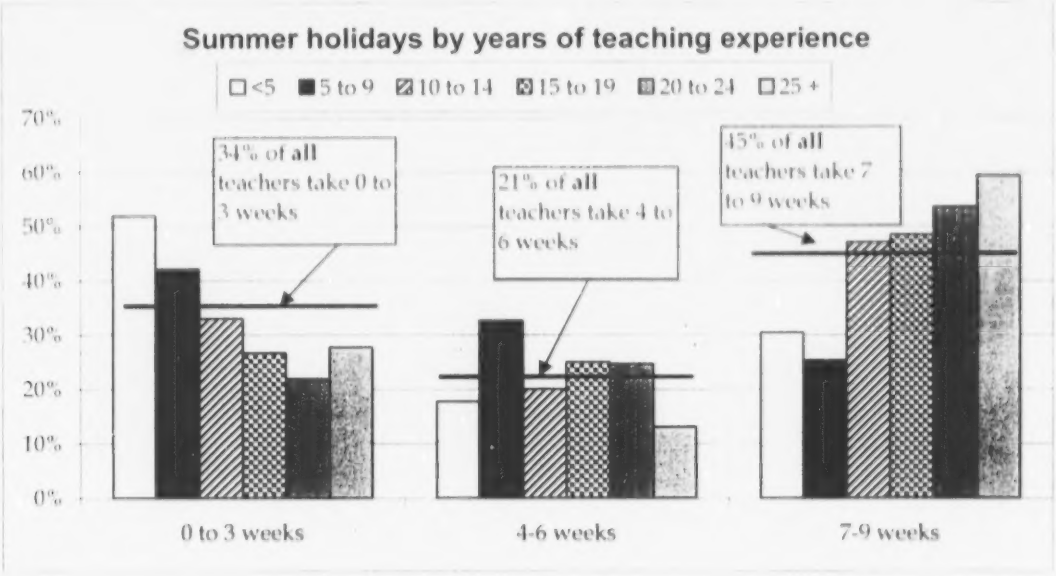


and older. At the other end of the spectrum, teachers aged 45 and over are twice as likely as teachers under 35 to take seven to nine weeks of holidays (54% vs. 28%). Part of the explanation may be that younger teachers tend to have more family responsibilities, and that they require more time to prepare for the school year, often still being in the apprenticeship stage of their careers.

Figure 3 illustrates that this relationship holds up for years of teaching experience as well. Teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience are the most likely to take the shortest holidays, and the least likely to take their full entitlement. The relationship is reversed for those with 20 or more years in the teaching profession.

It is encouraging to see that teachers are more likely to take their full allotment of holidays as they gain teaching experience. Unfortunately, this could be a result of years of stress taking their toll on the body and mind, resulting in a period that is more like extended sick leave rather than a preventative period of respite. **Younger and beginning teachers may want to consider the long-term preventative measure of healthful holiday breaks.**

Figure 3



What, if not holidays?

Besides taking a limited amount of time off as holidays, teachers spent parts of summer vacation 2000 teaching summer school, working at other jobs, taking educational courses, volunteering, preparing for the upcoming school year, or engaging in other activities.

Summer employment

The paltry salary means both my husband and I must teach summer school.

We are both teachers. We both need another job in the summer to pay the bills.

We can't afford to teach here and are thinking of moving to the States to teach.

-Comments from survey respondents

Teachers may work during the summer for a number of different reasons. Perhaps they like to keep busy, or they may enjoy teaching young people so much that they want to continue during the summer. **In many cases, however, a decade of stagnating salaries and losses to inflation, salaries that are low relative to those of other professionals, and the high cost of living in Canada's westernmost province mean that many teachers need to supplement their income by working during the summer.**

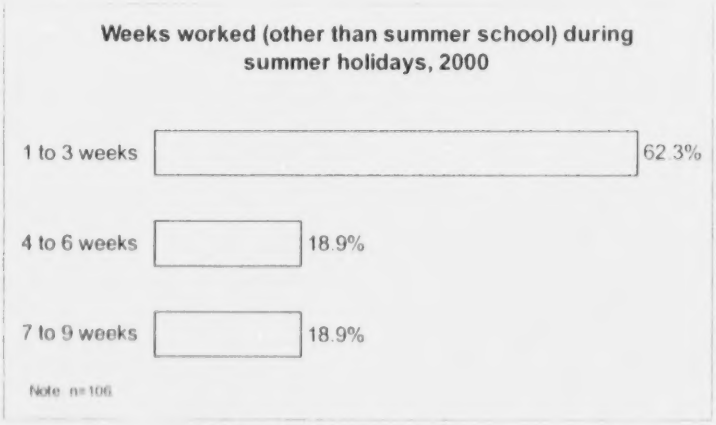
Teaching summer school

Our survey indicates that about 7% of teachers spend at least part of their summer teaching summer school.[9] Extrapolating this percentage to the BCTF's membership results in a **preliminary estimate of approximately 3,200 members who teach summer school**.[10]

Of those who teach summer school, 30% teach 1 to 3 weeks, 61% teach 4 to 6 weeks, and 9% teach 7 to 9 weeks.

Male teachers are somewhat more likely to teach summer school than female teachers. While women made up 70% of our sample, only 61% of summer school teachers were female.

Figure 4



Other employment

One in every 6 teachers (16.5%) works at a job other than teaching during the summer.[11] Of those who work at jobs other than teaching summer school, about 60% work 1 to 3 weeks, while the remaining 40% are divided evenly between working 4 to 6 and 7 to 9 weeks (*Figure 4*).

[9] The sub-sample size is quite small so the numbers in this section should be used with caution.

[10] This estimate must be used with caution as not all school districts offer summer school programs.

[11] The sub-sample size is quite small so the numbers in this section should be used with caution.

Overall summer employment

About 2% of teachers had another job *and* taught summer school. Without double-counting those teachers, our data indicate that **22% of teachers, or more than 1 in 5, are employed for at least part of the summer, whether teaching summer school or at another type of job.**

Taking educational courses

Many teachers return to the classroom in the summer – but they are on the other side of the desk, computer or discussion table, engaging in self-directed professional development and acquiring new credentials. **One of every 6 teachers (16.3%) took an educational course during the summer 2000 holidays.**[12] About two-thirds were at university for 1 to 3 weeks during the summer, and another third for 4 to 6 weeks.[13]

Women were almost twice as likely as men to be taking educational courses during the summer: **Almost 19% of female teachers attended school compared to about 11% of males.** Differences in existing credentials may be a factor contributing to female teachers' enhanced pursuit of advanced education. The Ministry of Education provides no direct measure of teachers' educational attainment, but salary grid placement offers a proxy measure. In 2000–2001, 23.9% of male teachers and 15.6% of female teachers were being paid at Category 6.[14] Since most Category 6 teachers have graduate degrees, this implies that men were nearly half again as likely as women to hold a master's degree. Average salary, a function of education and experience, is another indicator. In 2000, female classroom teachers' average salary was $53,528 while males' was $55,903.[15] Women are also twice as likely as men to have a standard teaching certificate or to be on a letter of permission rather than hold a professional teaching certificate.[16]

[12] The sub-sample size is quite small so the numbers in this section should be used with caution.

[13] The Ministry of Education has sponsored a Tuition Rebate Program allowing teachers access to up to $640 for taking courses in priority areas. The program is now under review.

[14] Ministry of Education Standard Report 2085, *FTE educators by gender, experience and salary category* (September 30, 2000).

[15] Ministry of Education Standard Report 2063, *Average Gross Salary of Educators by Gender and Position Within School District*, September 2000.

[16] 10.9% of women versus 5% of men hold a standard certificate or are working on a Letter of Permission. Ministry of Education Standard Report 2062, *Certificates Held by Educators by Position by Gender Within School District*, September 2000. For information on certificate types, consult the B.C. College of Teachers' web site at *www.bcct.bc.ca/*

Volunteering

At least 1 in 8 teachers (12.6%) spends some time volunteering during the summer vacation. Without calling it voluntarism, others participate in coaching or working with local community groups.

Unpaid education-related work

I had to teach/prepare for six different courses this year, which took a lot of prep (planning) time from my summer holidays.
–Comment from a survey respondent

Teachers are spending more and more of their own time wrapping up the previous year and preparing for the upcoming school year. In fact, "preparing for September" is the single largest activity teachers engage in after "holidays." The hours teachers spend preparing classrooms, materials and lesson plans are in addition to their already heavy workload during the school year. Our survey indicates that **nearly three-quarters of teachers spend at least one week of "the summer holidays" preparing for the upcoming school year** *(Table 2)*. Among full-time teachers, this proportion rises to 80%. Nearly 70% of full-time teachers spend 1 to 2 weeks of the summer break preparing for September and beyond.

As professionals who care about their students, many teachers in British Columbia choose to spend some of their summer holidays preparing for the upcoming school year. **The extent to which teachers subsidize the school system in this way indicates that preparation time during the school year is far from adequate. It is clear that teachers do not have sufficient preparation time to start up the school system in September; the result is that they end up subsidizing the system by preparing for classes during the summer.** In the 2001 round of negotiations, the B.C. Teachers' Federation sought improved preparation time to begin to address this issue.[17]

Many years of experience are required to become a master teacher. Teachers who are beginning their careers therefore often spend many additional hours of extra preparation time to teach their students. For example, **16.3% of teachers with less than 5 years of experience spent 3 to 4 weeks of their summer holidays preparing for the upcoming school year, compared to 7.3% of those with 20 to 24 years of experience.** In other words, new teachers were more than twice as likely as those with 20 to 24 years of experience to spend 3 to 4 weeks of their summer holidays preparing for the upcoming year.

In addition to doing preparation for September, some teachers also spent part of the summer break shutting down classrooms from the previous year, moving classrooms and libraries, cleaning up, and so on from the previous year. Others set up networks, marked government exams, participated in district projects, prepared and presented workshops, rebuilt school shops, and worked on Ministry projects, among other things.

Table 2: Weeks spent during summer preparing for school year

Weeks of preparation	Full-time	Others	Total
1 to 2 weeks	68.8%	46.6%	63.2%
3 to 4 weeks	9.8%	7.4%	9.2%
5 to 9 weeks	1.2%	2.5%	1.6%
TOTAL	**79.8%**	**56.4%**	**73.9%**

Note: "Full-time" includes continuing and term. "Others" includes part-time and TOCs. Assumed omitted responses = 0 weeks (n=83 for FT, n=60 for others).

[17] The BCTF's proposal called for increasing preparation time for elementary teachers to 225 minutes per week and for middle- and secondary-school teachers to 386 minutes per week. Negotiations 2001: Respective Positions of the Parties on a Number of Key Issues as of November 26, 2001, *www.bctf.bc.ca/bargain/negotiations/facts/positions.html*.

Other activities

Our survey gave teachers the opportunity to specify other ways in which they spent their summer vacations.

Family responsibilities

Family activities and responsibilities are the next most common other activity mentioned. This category includes diverse activities such as childcare, elder care, looking after relatives' children, getting married, and working in a family business.

Wellness and illness

Maintaining wellness, taking time out for surgery or maternity leave, or dealing with the effects of a stressful school year on one's health are other popular activities for teachers during the summer.

Home maintenance

Teachers also use the summer to move house, to look after their homes, to build houses, and other maintenance activities.

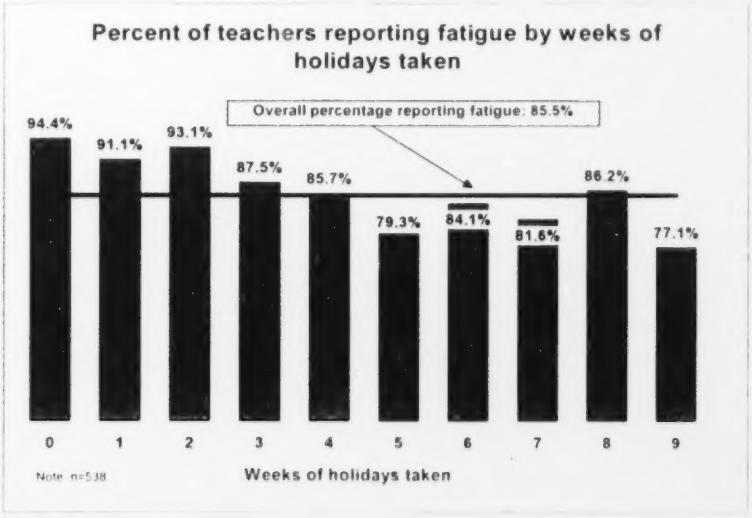
Connections between time off and reported health effects

In our survey, we asked teachers to report whether their worklife had any of the following effects on their personal lives: fatigue, loss of time with family or friends, loss of time for personal interests or hobbies, less interest in other areas, or health problems.

Fatigue

Perhaps not surprisingly, the data demonstrate a strong negative relationship[18] between the number of weeks of summer holidays taken and the percentage of teachers reporting feeling fatigued. In other words, **those who took more summer holidays were less likely to feel fatigued during the school year.** The bad news is that **more than 85% of teachers reported that their work resulted in fatigue**, as shown in *Figure 5*. **Of those who reported taking no summer holidays, almost 95% reported fatigue during the year**; the best rested (relatively speaking, as 77% of them reported feelings of fatigue) were those who took all nine weeks of the summer off.

Figure 5



[18] Correlation coefficient: $r = -0.85$.

Time for family and friends

There is also a strong negative relationship[19] between the amount of summer holidays teachers take and a sense of having less time with family or friends because of work: **83% of those who took no holidays report their worklife results in less time with family or friends, compared to 49% of those who took 9 weeks** *(Figure 6)*. Many teachers already feel isolated from their colleagues because of workload, lack of collegial preparation time, and the classroom-oriented structure of most schools. When work interferes with time with family and friends, isolation is compounded; as we shall see later on, isolation is a risk factor for disease and disability.

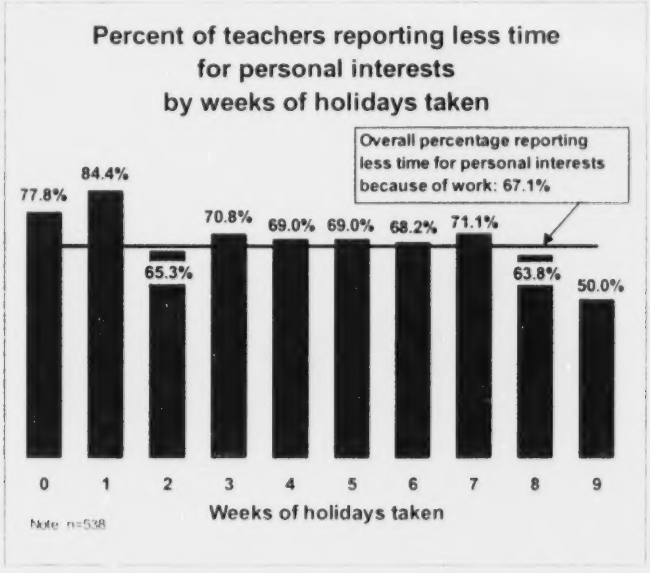
Figure 6

[19] Correlation coefficient: r = -0.88

Time for personal interests

Similarly, **those who take no summer holidays are more than half again as likely as those who take 9 weeks to report that work pressures result in less time for their own personal interests or hobbies** (77.8% vs. 50%, *Figure 7*).

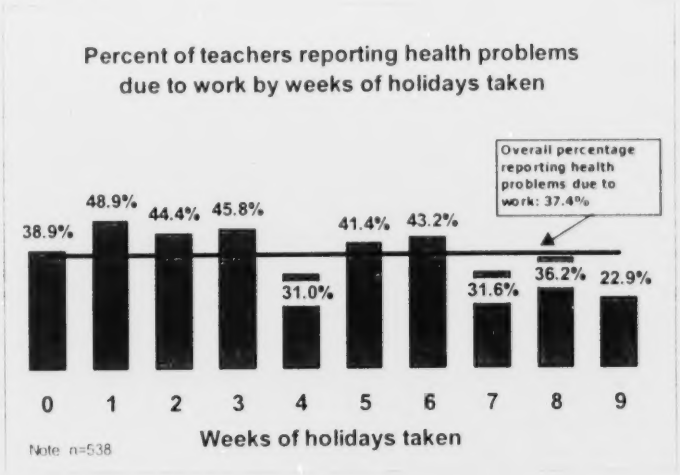
Figure 7



Health problems

An astounding 37% of teachers report the presence of some health problems related to their work life (*Figure 8*). The connection between this variable and weeks of summer holidays taken is not as clear-cut as the other effects discussed above.[20] There is, however, a clear distinction between those who took only 0 to 3 weeks of holidays and those who take 7 to 9: **Teachers who took the minimum holidays to which they are entitled are half again as likely as those who took seven to nine weeks of holidays to report health problems resulting from work (45% vs. 31%).**

Figure 8



[20] Correlation coefficient: r = -0.67

Wellness

So what can we make of these relationships between time taken as summer holidays and the health and social effects drawn out by the survey? One way to look at it is through the concept of **wellness**, which is rapidly becoming part of mainstream thought. The University of California at Berkeley's *Wellness Letter* defines wellness as "much more than simply the absence of sickness. It is optimal physical, mental, and emotional well-being, a preventive way of living that reduces—sometimes even eliminates—the need for remedies."[21] The focus is on personal responsibility, lifestyle choices, and prevention of disease and disability. There is mounting evidence that **prolonged stress—especially that caused by isolation and a sense of lack of control—can result in wear and tear on the body, with potential consequences including heart disease, a weakened immune system, insulin resistance (potential for diabetes), and possibly cancer.**

While the figures from our survey cannot demonstrate a causative link between not taking enough of a break during the summer and health effects including fatigue, isolation, and specific health problems resulting from teachers' working conditions, they do make a strong case for summer "down time" as an essential element of teachers' wellness in the current teaching climate. **Teachers who are physically and emotionally healthy are more likely to remain in the teaching profession, thus enhancing teacher retention in a time of potential teacher shortages.** Holidays also give teachers time to reflect on professional practice, to step back and take stock, as da Vinci recommended to budding painters.

[21] *www.berkeleywellness.com*

Conclusion and recommendations

Media distortions and misunderstanding about teaching.

Media and public that put down the school system.

General lack of respect toward the public school system from public and government.

—Comments from survey respondents when asked to identify and explain the most significant aspect of workload or stress in their professional lives

While there is a common misconception that teachers work from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. with generous holidays, the reality is that teachers work long hours during the school year and engage in paid work, unpaid work, and educational activities during the summer break. Our survey provides evidence that B.C. teachers are a highly professional group of people who invest their own time to serve their students, improve their own qualifications, complete projects, and prepare educational programs.[22]

Our data show that many teachers in B.C. are actually suffering from "phantom summer vacation." While teachers ostensibly have two months off during the summer, it is rare for teachers to use all of this time as traditional holidays. Both the nature of teachers' working lives in British Columbia today and our evidence, however, indicate that **it is in the best interest of teachers, students, and the education system for teachers to have a sustained period of rest and recuperation during the summer break.** Teachers are sensitive to negative commentary, yet, to protect their own health and well-being, some teachers may need to inure themselves to criticism from the media, public, and government and simply take their summer holidays without guilt.

Unfortunately, **stress and health problems commonly result from teachers' attempts to subsidize an under-resourced system. Adequate funding** for learning resources is essential to teachers' health and the health of the system, as are **competitive, adequate professional salaries** that reflect teachers' educational background and responsibilities. **Adequate preparation time** during the school year and allowance for **year-end "clean-up" time** would make for healthier schools and teachers. The current North American obsession with "minutes of instruction" and a growing emphasis on measurable outcomes interfere with a healthy learning environment.[23]

Possible future research could include **a study of teachers who become ill or disabled**. What factors contributed to these outcomes? How could these outcomes be prevented or attenuated? Another study could **focus on teacher wellness**, perhaps examining what coping strategies work to maintain teachers' health. A **stress prevention project**, such as the pilot project undertaken by the Irish government and teachers, could be considered.[24]

Further research could also be done exploring **gender-age-health interactions**, including such factors as the relationship of vacation time taken and patterns of illness and disability among teachers. The existence of **family-friendly policies** may be one attenuating factor.

One thing is clear: if teachers' well-being is valued—and it should be, both for its own sake and for the sake of the public-education

[22] It has been shown elsewhere that teachers also subsidize the system by investing their own scarce dollars in learning resources for the classroom. See, for example, "So where are the Learning Resources, and who paid for them?" at *www.bctf.bc.ca/ResearchReports/2001ei01/report.html* and "Teachers subsidize schools" at *www.bctf.bc.ca/research/list/archive/2000-01/2001-04-24.html*.

[23] "Teachers in the United States consistently suggest that one of the biggest constraints on the rate and success of education reform is their lack of time for professional activities other than the direct instruction of students." "Guarding teachers' time" by Harold W. Stevenson, *Education Week*, September 16, 1998 (on the web at *www.edweek.org/ew/vol-18/02steven.h18*) reports on a study released by the U.S. Department of Education entitled *Trying to beat the clock. Uses of teacher professional time in three countries, www.enc.org/topics/change/practice/world/document.shtm?input=ACQ-137042-7042*.

[24] More information available at *www.tui.ie/stress.htm*.

system—a sea change in understanding of and discourse about the nature of teachers' work needs to occur. Contrast, for example, the following recent statements:

(Washington) State school Superintendent Terry Bergeson, citing the terrorist attacks on the East Coast, yesterday called for a "declaration of interdependence" between educators, parents and communities to produce not just good test-takers, but informed and engaged citizens....

She said voters have demonstrated their faith in public schools through strong support of last fall's Initiative 728 (class-size reduction) and I-732 (teacher cost-of-living allowance). She also noted voters passed $1.5 billion in local bonds and levies last spring and this fall....

She also said she wants to preserve funding for the two approved education initiatives and to support teachers. "Our children are our future, and we entrust that future to our teachers," she told the crowd.

Bergeson acknowledged...that teacher salary increases would be a tough sell amid a tough budget climate, but said she would fight for every cent and program to help retain quality teachers despite a nationwide shortage.

"Bergeson on learning for life"
by Debera Carlton Harrell
Seattle Post-Intelligencer,
November 17, 2001

A three-year spending freeze on the current $4.8-billion education budget can actually produce a better education system in B.C., Education Minister Christy Clark said Wednesday.

"Education is going to be better in three years," Clark said, suggesting new spending priorities will ensure money is targeted at student achievement.

"I think in British Columbia we have a long way to go to improve our education system. It's a very good one but there's a lot we can do to fix it and improve it."

"Education 'to be better' despite freeze: minister"
by Jim Beatty and Janet Steffenhagen
The Vancouver Sun, *October 4, 2001*

"The tests showed we are doing well, there's no question about that," Education Minister Christy Clark said Tuesday, adding that everyone has a right to be proud, especially the students. "But I don't think that's an invitation for us to sit on our laurels [sic]*."*

She said the system must be more accountable so that schools and school boards deal quickly with problems.

"We need to know that we are improving year-on-year, not just how well we measure up to Brazil every three years," Clark stated, referring to the country that came last in all three tests.

"Test shows Canadian students are second-best readers in the world"
by Janet Steffenhagen
The Vancouver Sun, *December 5, 2001*

...(W)e support – in broad terms, though not necessarily every specific way – the determination of the provincial government to introduce some meaningful reforms. The people in the education industry – the bureaucrats, administrators, teachers, et al. – have been spending huge amounts of public money and delivering mediocre results. They've been allowed to try countless experiments – whole language instruction, child-centred learning, and more.

And they haven't delivered acceptable results.

The public, we believe, has been patient with a second-rate system for too long. We wouldn't put up with shoddy goods – one failure in four – coming from an industry, and we shouldn't put up with it when it's harming our children, our most treasured resource.

"We're getting shoddy goods from our education industry"
Editorial, The Vancouver Sun,
November 9, 2001

Evidence accumulated in this and other worklife studies can provide an accurate picture of teachers' working lives on which media reports and public policy can be based, leading to improved working and learning conditions in the province's public-education system, if the political will is there to do so. Replacing teacher-bashing and negative comments about public schools by the media, public and government with a supportive, respectful milieu in which true education can occur would go a long way to improving the work life of teachers and, consequently, the schools in which our children learn.

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